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SOME MOUNTAIN SUPERSTITIONS OF THE SOUTH.

IT would be interesting to know where superstition began, and more interesting to know where lies the exact boundary line between it and science, truth, philosophy. Man's wisdom will probably never make a dot there.

In many instances the difference between superstition and sound sense is about the same as that which Bishop Warburton defined between orthodoxy and heterodoxy, "Orthodoxy is my doxy ; heterodoxy is another man's doxy."

Although so great a man as Edmund Burke says that superstition is the religion of feeble minds, a very ordinary person may be allowed to suggest that it would be difficult sometimes to prove whose is the feeble mind ; and certainly conviction would be seldom secured by admission of guilt.

Burke suggests degrees of folly in superstitions, and says if a prudent man were called to pass judgment upon them, "perhaps he would think the superstition which builds to be more tolerable than that which demolishes — that which adorns a country, than that which plunders — that which disposes to mistaken beneficence, than that which stimulates to real injustice — that which leads a man to refuse to himself lawful pleasures, than that which snatches from others the scanty subsistence of their self-denial."

I think it a sufficient classification to say that superstitions are three in kind, — useful, vicious, innoxious ; as, for instance, such as built the pyramids, such as burned the witches, and such as suggests to a person the desirability of seeing the new moon over his right shoulder.

Our Southern mountain superstitions are in the main comparatively harmless. Many of them are amusing to a degree, and a few, unfortunately, are capable of leading on to the gravest consequences.

Following are a few of widest acceptance : —

If a whip-poor-will alights upon your doorstep and sings, it is likely to bring bad luck. You should throw fire at it, and it will not return.

When you hear the first whip-poor-will in springtime, you should lie down upon the ground, roll over three times, then reach over your left shoulder and pick up the first thing that your hand rests upon. Put this under your pillow at night, go to sleep lying on your right side, and whatever you dream will surely come to pass.

It betokens bad luck to hear the first cooing of a dove in spring,

unless you chance to be standing at the time. If you are lying down you will be sick during the remainder of the year; and if sitting you will have bad health all the rest of the year.

When an unmarried woman hears the first cooing of a dove in the spring, she should take nine steps forward, and then nine steps backward, all without speaking. Then she should take off her right shoe, and in it she will find a hair from her future husband's head.

If an owl hoots around the house, it is a sign of death. If you put an iron in the fire, however, when you hear it hoot, it will immediately go away. But that may not prevent the calamity.

For a turtle-dove to flutter in front of you is a very bad sign.

You should never turn a meal sack or flour sack wrong side up when emptying it. If you do, you will be in need of the article which it contained, and be compelled to borrow before you can otherwise procure any more.

You should never take a broom with you when you move, unless you throw it clear through the house which you are about to occupy before taking in any other article whatever.

You should not sweep before breakfast Sunday morning. If you do you will hear of the death of a relative or friend before the week ends.

Two persons should never sweep at the same time in the same house. It is an omen of bad luck.

If you force the accumulations of sweeping out through the door with a broom, you sweep away your fortune with them. If you have no open fireplace, you should gather up the accumulations and burn them in a stove.

If you see a broom lying across the doorway when you go to a neighbor's house, do not step over it under any circumstances. It is a trap to catch witches, who always step over brooms. If you step over one, you will be inevitably regarded a witch.

Do not allow a cat to follow after you and mew. It is an ill omen.

Never take a cat with you when you move.

Never kill your own cat. If you must get rid of it, and can think of no other way, get somebody else to kill it for you.

If a black cat comes to your house, do not allow it to remain, because it comes for the express purpose of bringing you bad luck.

But if a spotted cat comes, keep it by all means if you can, as it will bring good luck.

If a chicken crows after it goes to roost, go immediately and kill it. If you do not, you will hear bad news.

If a hen crows at any time, kill her at once. She is trying to crow bad luck to you or some of your family.

If the crickets do not chirp in your hearth, go to a neighbor's house and borrow some. If these do not remain and chirp for you, wisdom dictates that you move out of the house at once, as you will never know happiness there.

Do not trim your finger-nails during Friday unless you are troubled with toothache. In that event trim them every Friday night during nine consecutive weeks. This will effect a cure.

If you trim your finger and toe nails Fridays, you will not have toothache. Neither will you if you trim them any other day and bury the trimmings in a hole which you have bored in a tree for the purpose.

Never begin anything either Friday or Saturday. Friday is essentially an unlucky day; and if you begin something Saturday and do not finish it that day, you will not live to finish it.

Wash your warp and dye it while the moon is growing, and it will stretch. But if you wash and dye it while the moon is waning, it will shrink.

Never have a garment cut or made while you are sick. If you do, you will not live to wear it.

Never tie one shoe before you put on the other, else you will be "mad" all day. This is all the more certain to be the case if it be the left shoe that you tie first.

If you put on a garment wrong side out, it bodes good luck if you will but wear it that way all day. However, if you can turn it right side out over the top of your head, without seeing it, you may do so without danger of breaking the charm.

It is indicative of good luck to wear the left stocking wrong side out.

Should you chance to be led around by a jack-o-lantern, take off your stocking and turn it wrong side out; or if that is not convenient, or you have no stockings with you, turn your pocket wrong side out, and the jack-o-lantern will go its way and molest you no more during that journey.

If a woman starts anywhere upon an errand or for any kind of business and the first person she meets is a woman, she should at once turn back; for she will not have good luck regarding her mission. But if she meets a man first, she may confidently expect good luck.

If a man starts upon a mission and first meets a man, he should turn back. Ill luck awaits him. If he first meets a woman, it is a good omen.

If a person starts anywhere and has to turn back for any reason, he should be sure to make a cross mark in the road at the spot where he turns back, spit in the centre of it, and then when he

leaves the house the second time he should go out at a different door than that by which he first left. Then he will have destroyed the conditions which would otherwise have brought bad luck.

If you see the new moon through clouds or treetops, you will have trouble until the next new moon.

When you get up in the morning be sure that you put both feet out of bed exactly at the same instant. Otherwise you will have trouble all day.

Do not sing before breakfast, or you will cry before night.

Salt and pepper should be the first articles to be taken into a new house, or one that you are going to occupy for the first time.

If a baby has thrush, stop the first man that comes along, borrow one of his shoes, and give the little one a drink of water out of it. This is considered a specific.

If your right ear burns, somebody is saying good of you.

If your left ear burns, somebody is saying ill of you.

If your right ear itches, you will hear good news.

If your left ear itches, you will hear a secret.

If the palm of your right hand itches, you will shake hands with a stranger.

If the palm of your left hand itches, you will handle money.

If the bottom of your right foot itches, you will walk on strange ground soon.

If the bottom of your left foot itches, you will soon walk on strange ground, to your disadvantage.

It may have been noted that some of these superstitions go hand in hand with convenience, economy, prudence, etc. : as, for example, "Do not sweep before breakfast;" "Do not kill your cat, but get somebody else to kill it, if it must be killed;" "Do not begin anything Friday or Saturday;" "If you put a garment on wrong side out, wear it so all day;" "Do not close a neighbor's gate;" and "Do not loan anything to a suspected witch."

I suppose that all sections and all classes have more or less of superstition. Even in the metropolis there are men who think that a cocktail is good for a cold; a drink of whiskey straight is good for the health in December; and a glass of brandy and soda or a julep equally as beneficial in hot weather.

The mountaineers in some sections have superstitions to bolster up, morally speaking, their tastes and appetites.

As most people know, there are moonshiners in some of the mountain districts. They make whiskey without consulting Uncle Sam about it.

The people drink the whiskey.

They often justify both the drinking and the act of patronizing offenders against law by such pretexts as that they need some on hand in case of snake bites. But a more common pretext is that when cows eat grass in certain coves with north exposures, while the dew is on the grass, they take "milk sick," and the disease is communicated to people by means of the milk.

Failure of the milk to foam is the first warning that milk sick is abroad in the land. And yet when a mountain woman milks a cow with one hand only, as she usually does, the chances are sixteen to one that very little if any foam will appear on the milk.

Whiskey is agreed to be a specific for milk sick, and hence whiskey must be kept on hand. "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure," and therefore the whiskey should be used often for fear that milk sick may come.

As whiskey cannot be had conveniently from other sources, of course it is permissible to buy it from the moonshiners, or make it yourself, just for home consumption, if not a little for "the export trade."

H. M. Wiltse.